

SHARON C. COLLIER (State Bar No. 203450)
Sharon.Collier@fmglaw.com
FREEMAN MATHIS & GARY, LLP
1255 Treat Blvd., Suite 300
Walnut Creek, CA 94597
P: (925) 644-0918
F: (833) 335-7962

Attorneys for Defendant COSTCO WHOLESALE CORPORATION

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA**

LEIGH PATTERSON, an individual,

Plaintiff,

v.

COSTCO WHOLESALE CORPORATION, a
Corporation, CHERYL “DOE”, and individual,
and DOES 1 through 25, inclusive,

Defendants.

Case No.

[Humboldt County Superior Court Case
No. CV2200529]

**DEFENDANT COSTCO
WHOLESALE CORPORATION’S
NOTICE OF REMOVAL TO
FEDERAL COURT PURSUANT TO
28 U.S.C. § 1441(b) [DIVERSITY]**

Complaint Filed: April 19, 2022

TO THE HONORABLE JUDGES AND CLERK OF THE COURT:

PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that Defendant COSTCO WHOLESALE CORPORATION
 (“Costco”) hereby removes to this Court the state court action described below:

I. STATUS OF PLEADINGS AND DISCOVERY

On or about April 19, 2022, Plaintiff LEIGH PATTERSON (“Plaintiff”) filed a Complaint
against Costco, CHERYL “DOE”, and Does 1 to 25 in Humboldt County Superior Court, entitled
LEIGH PATTERSON, an individual, v. COSTCO WHOLESALE CORPORATION, a
Corporation, LYNNETTE “DOE”, an individual, and DOES 1-25, inclusive, Case No.
22CV008571 (the “Complaint”). (Request for Judicial Notice in Support of Costco’s Notice of

Removal (“RJN”), Ex. A; Declaration of Sharon C. Collier (“Collier Decl.”) at ¶ 3.) The Complaint alleges causes of action for negligence and premises liability. (RJN, Ex. A.) Costco was served with the Summons and a copy of the Complaint on or about May 19, 2022. (RJN, Ex. A; Collier Decl. at ¶ 3.) In conjunction with receiving the Complaint, Costco also received a statement of damages claiming damages totaling \$2 million, far exceeding the \$75,000 jurisdictional threshold. (Collier Decl. at ¶ 4.)

The Complaint alleges that on or about April 30, 2020, Plaintiff fell at a Costco warehouse in Humboldt, California, and sustained injuries. (RJN, Ex. A.) Plaintiff seeks damages for pain and suffering, medical and incidental expenses, lost wages, and lost earning capacity. (RJN, Ex. A.)

Costco filed an Answer to Plaintiff’s Complaint in Case No. 22CV008571 of the Humboldt County Superior Court contemporaneously with this Notice of Removal and supporting documents. (RJN, Ex. C; Collier Decl. at ¶ 5.) In the Answer, Costco asserted a general denial, as well as various affirmative defenses. (RJN, Ex. B.)

Costco is not aware of Plaintiff effectuating service on any of the “Doe” defendants. (Collier Decl. at ¶ 6.) Since no other defendant has been properly named and served, no consent is required for removal. (28 U.S.C. § 1446(b); *Destfino v. Reiswig*, 630 F.3d 952, 956 (9th Cir. 2011).)

As this action was commenced in the Humboldt County Superior Court, removal to the Northern District of California is appropriate.

II. STATEMENT OF JURISDICTION

This civil action involves parties who are citizens of different states and the amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000. Accordingly, this Court has jurisdiction under 28 U.S.C. § 1332, and has the power to remove this matter to this Court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. section 1441(b).

A. Complete Diversity of Citizenship

In order to invoke federal diversity jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. section 1332, complete diversity of citizenship must exist between the parties. (*Matao Yokeno v. Sawako Sekiguchi*, 754 F.3d 649, 652 (9th Cir. 2014).) Here, Plaintiff and Costco are citizens of different

1 states and the citizenship of the “Doe” defendants must be disregarded. Thus, diversity of
2 citizenship exists between the parties.

3 For purposes of removal, “the citizenship of defendants sued under fictitious names shall be
4 disregarded.” (28 U.S.C. § 1441(b).) Where a plaintiff’s allegations do not provide definite clues
5 sufficient for the moving defendant to identify the fictitiously named defendant, the citizenship of
6 the fictitiously named defendant shall be disregarded. (See e.g., *Guytan v. Swift Transportation Co.*
7 *of Arizona, LLC*, No. CV1700626VAPDTBX, 2017 WL 2380159, at *2 (C.D. Cal. June 1, 2017)
8 (holding that identifying a fictitiously named defendant as “a terminal manager” of the moving
9 defendant in the complaint was insufficient to determine the identity of the fictitiously named
10 defendant and therefore, the fictitiously named defendant’s citizenship must be disregarded.) While
11 Plaintiff sued a Lynnette “DOE” and Does 1-50, she has not named them specifically, Costco is
12 unaware of Plaintiff effectuating service on them. Thus, the citizenship of the “Doe” defendants
13 must be disregarded.

14 For diversity purposes, a person is a “citizen” of the state in which he or she is domiciled.
15 (*Kantor v. Wellesley Galleries, Ltd.*, 704 F.2d 1088, 1090 (9th Cir. 1983).) A person’s domicile is
16 the place he or she resides with the intention to remain or to which he or she intends to return.
17 (*Kanter v. Warner-Lambert Co.*, 265 F.3d 853, 857 (9th Cir. 2001).) Here, Plaintiff alleges in her
18 Complaint that she is a resident of Humboldt County, California. (RJN Ex. A; Collier Decl. at ¶
19 10.) Accordingly, Plaintiff is and was a citizen of the State of California.

20 In order to ascertain the citizenship of a corporation, courts look to the state of
21 incorporation, and the state where the corporation has its principal place of business. (28 U.S.C.
22 § 1332(c)(1).) Here, Costco is a corporation formed and incorporated under the laws of the State of
23 Washington. (RJN, Ex. D; Collier Decl. at ¶ 8.) Moreover, Costco is headquartered and maintains
24 its principal place of business at 999 Lake Drive, Issaquah, Washington 98207. (RJN, Ex. E;
25 Collier Decl. at ¶ 9.) Accordingly, Costco was and is a citizen of the State of Washington. As such,
26 diversity-of-citizenship exists between the parties.

B. No Resident Defendants

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1441(b)(2), when removing a case to federal court on the basis of diversity jurisdiction, none of the defendants may be “citizens of the State in which such action is brought.” In this case, Plaintiff resides in California. (RJN, Ex. A; Collier Decl. at ¶ 10.) The only named and served defendant, Costco, is a citizen of the State of Washington. (RJN, Ex. C, D; Collier Decl. at ¶ 8.) As the domicile of the “Doe” defendants must be disregarded, complete diversity exists because no defendant resides in the State of California.

C. Amount in Controversy

Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1332(a), in order to invoke diversity jurisdiction, the amount in controversy must exceed \$75,000, exclusive of interests and costs. (28 U.S.C. § 1332(a).) When a plaintiff fails to “specify a particular amount of damages” in the complaint, the removing party is required to establish that it is “more likely than not” that the amount in controversy exceeds the statutory amount. (*Gaus v. Miles, Inc.*, 980 F.2d 564, 566 (9th Cir. 1992); *McPhail v. Derre & Co.*, (10th Cir. 2008) 529 F.3d 947, 954 (removing defendant must prove by a preponderance of the evidence that the amount in controversy is satisfied).) In making that determination, courts consider compensatory costs, including general and special damages, as well as attorney fees. (*Meisel v. Allstate Indem. Co.*, 357 F.Supp.2d 1222, 1225 (E.D. Cal. 2005).) Courts also consider “other papers” not filed with the court. (*Kuxhausen v. BMW Financial Services NA LLC*, 797 F.3d 1136, 1140 (9th Cir. 2013).) Settlement demand correspondence constitutes an “other paper” sufficient to provide notice of removal. (*Bloomer v. Serco Mgmt. Servs.*, No. EDCV 16-2651 JGB (RAOx), 2017 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 25606, at *8 (C.D. Cal. Feb. 23, 2017) (citing *Babasa v. Lenscrafters, Inc.*, 498 F.3d 972, 974-75 (9th Cir. 2002)); *see also Ackerberg v. Citicorp USA, Inc.*, 887 F. Supp. 2d 934, 938-39 (N.D. Cal. 2012).) The amount in controversy is merely an estimate of the total amount in dispute; it is not a prospective assessment of the defendant’s liability. (*Lewis v. Verizon Communications, Inc.*, 627 F.3d 395, 400 (9th Cir. 2010).)

A plaintiff’s concession that the amount in controversy exceeds \$75,000 is sufficient to establish diversity jurisdiction upon this Court. (See *Singer v. State Farm Mut. Auto Ins. Co.*, 116

1 F.3d 373, 376 (“...where state law prohibited plaintiff from stating the amount in controversy in
 2 the complaint, the district judge has discretion to accept the admission as establishing it.
 3 Otherwise, we would be adopting the illogical position that a plaintiff can establish the amount in
 4 controversy by an ad damnum, but not by a formal admission against the plaintiff’s interest in
 5 choice of forum.”). Such a concession is tantamount to a plaintiff expressly alleging damages in
 6 excess of the jurisdictional amount, which we accept as the amount in controversy if done in good
 7 faith. (*See Dart Cherokee Basin Operating Co., LLC v. Owens*, 135 S. Ct. 547, 551 (2014).)
 8 Moreover, the courts looks to “facts presented in the removal petition as well as any summary
 9 judgment type evidence relevant to the amount in controversy at the time of removal.” (*Matheson*
 10 *v. Progressive Specialty Ins., Co.*, 319 F.3d 1089, 1090 (9th Cir. 2003); *Johnson v. Am. Online,*
 11 *Inc.*, 208 F.Supp.2d 1018 (N.D. Cal. 2003) (A defendant may rely on discovery responses for
 12 determining the amount in controversy).)

13 In the present case, Costco received in conjunction with the Complaint a statement of
 14 damages alleging that Plaintiff’s damages total more than \$2 million. (RJN, Exhibit B; Collier
 15 Decl. at ¶ 4.) Thus, Plaintiff’s claimed damages far exceed \$75,000. (RJN, Exhibit B; Collier Decl.
 16 at ¶¶ 4, 12.) The statement of damages clearly constitutes an “other paper” which may be
 17 considered for purposes of determining the amount in controversy here. (*Ackerberg v. Citicorp*
 18 *USA, Inc.*, 887 F. Supp. 2d 934, 938-39 (N.D. Cal. 2012).) In light of these representations and the
 19 scope of injuries and types of damages alleged in the Complaint, it is clear that the claims at issue
 20 will exceed the jurisdictional minimum of this Court.

21 **III. TIMELINESS OF REMOVAL**

22 Pursuant to 28 U.S.C. section 1446(b), “[t]he notice of removal shall be filed within 30 days
 23 after receipt by the defendant, through service or otherwise, of a copy of the initial pleading setting
 24 forth the claim for relief upon which such action or proceeding is based...” (28 U.S.C. § 1446(b).)
 25 The 30-day time limit within which a defendant can remove an action to federal court does not
 26 begin until the defendant(s) have received notice of the facts supporting removal. (*Mattel, Inc. v.*
 27 *Bryant*, 441 F. Supp. 2d 1081, 1089-1090 (C.D. Cal. 2005), *aff’d*, 446 F.3d 1011 (9th Cir. 2006).)

As set forth more fully above, Costco was served with the Complaint and Statement of Damages on or about April 5, 2022. (RJN, Ex. A; Collier Decl. at ¶¶ 3-4.) The Complaint indicates Plaintiff is domiciled in California and the settlement demand alleges the amount in controversy exceeds the jurisdictional minimum. (RJN, Ex. A, B; Collier Decl. at ¶¶ 4, 10, 12.) Accordingly, Costco has timely and promptly filed this petition for removal. (28 U.S.C. § 1446.)

IV. JOINDER OF ALL DEFENDANTS

In order to effectuate removal, all defendants properly joined and served with the complaint must join in the notice of removal. (28 U.S.C. § 1446(b); *Emrich v. Touche Ross & Co.*, 846 F.2d 1190, 1193 (9th Cir. 1988).) In this case, Costco is not aware of Plaintiff effectuating service on the “Doe” defendants. (Collier Decl. at ¶ 6.) Accordingly, this Notice of Removal is proper.

V. VENUE

Venue of this removed action is proper pursuant to 28 U.S.C. section 1441(a) because this Court is the United States District Court for the district corresponding to the place where the state court action was commenced.


VI. NOTICE TO PLAINTIFF

Costco’s Notice to Adverse Parties of Notice of Removal is being contemporaneously filed in Case 22CV008571 of the Humboldt County Superior Court. (Collier Decl. at ¶ 13.)

WHEREFORE, Costco prays that the above-entitled action, currently pending in the Humboldt County Superior Court of California, be removed to the United States District Court for the Northern District of California, and that this action proceed in this Court as an action properly removed there.

Dated: June 21, 2022

FREEMAN MATHIS & GARY, LLP

By: 
 Sharon C. Collier
 Attorneys for Defendant COSTCO
 WHOLESALE CORPORATION

PROOF OF SERVICE

I am employed in the County of Contra Costa, State of California. I am over the age of 18 and not a party to the within action. My business address is 1255 Treat Blvd, Suite 300, Walnut Creek, California 94597. My electronic service email address is javi.brantley@fmglaw.com

On June 21, 2022, I served electronic copies of the within document(s) described as:

**DEFENDANT COSTCO
WHOLESALE CORPORATION'S NOTICE OF REMOVAL TO
FEDERAL COURT PURSUANT TO 28 U.S.C. § 1441(b) [DIVERSITY]**

on the interested parties in this action as stated below:

**John N Metri, Esq.
Downtown L.A. Law Group
601 N. Vermont Ave
Los Angeles, CA 90004
T) 213.389.3765
F) 877.389.2775
Email: John.Metri@downtownlalaw.com**

Attorney for Plaintiff Leigh Patterson

☒ (BY E-MAIL) Pursuant to CCP 1010.6, subdivision (e) by transmitting a true copy of the foregoing document(s) to the e-mail addresses set forth above per electronic service agreement.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on June 21, 2022, at Martinez, California.

Javi Brantley
(Type or print name)



(Signature)